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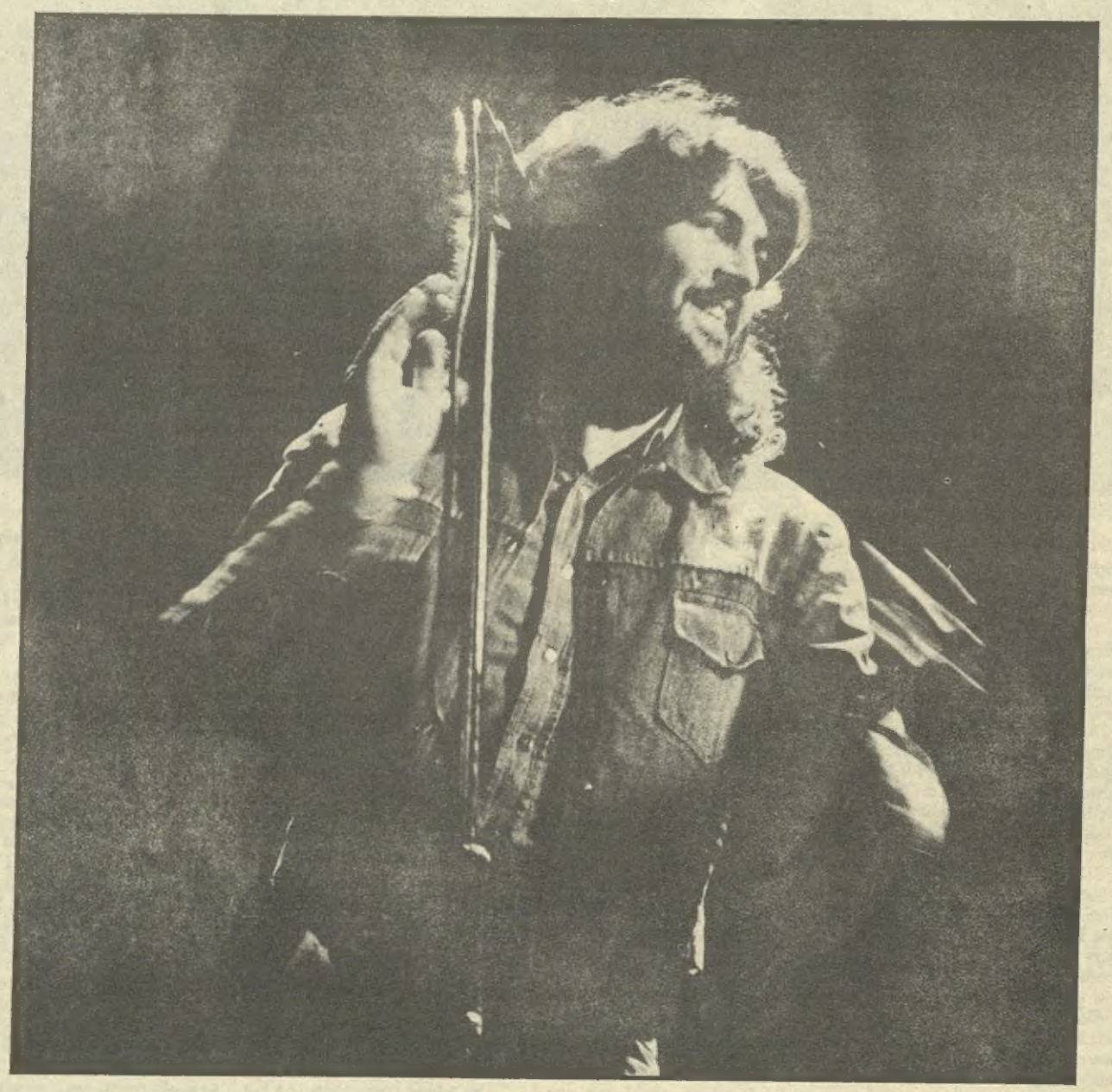
Shades of Deep Purple

Ian Gillan left Deep Purple to start a mini-cab firm but found that...

Rock and roll's in Gillan's soul

by Pete Makowski



"We all came out to Montreux,
On the lake Geneva shoreline.
To make a record with a mobile,
*We didn't have much time."**

THE immortal words above, as y'all probably know, are from one of Deep Purple's most successful toons — 'Smoke On The Water'. It tells the true story of the great Casino disaster which occurred when the band went to Switzerland to record 'Machine Head'.

Apart from being a pretty slick crap joint, the Casino was also a highly respected European venue and was going to be the location the band were going to record utilising a mobile unit. I say 'were' because just before they got there disaster struck.

It was on the night that Uncle Frank and the Mothers were playing there that, as the Purps put it: "some stupid with a flare gun, burned the place to the ground."

"Smoke on the water, a fire in the sky!"

Purple ended up recording the album at the Grand hotel. The casino had to be completely rebuilt, which brings us to the story.

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Montreux is essentially a retiring home for rich persons. Like Brighton only a bit classier. It's a place where a millionaire can spend his last years in the healthiest of surroundings before pushing off to that great Swiss deposit account in the sky.

It's also the home of the Montreux jazz festival which, so the city's tourist officer informs me, is overtaking the legendary Newport jazz festival in popularity and repute.

Montreux is also now the location for a new venture. The Mountain recording studios which have been installed into the brand spanking new casino building and is run by Jack Grod and his attractive American singer wife Anita Kerr.

Although it started business last July in time for the aforementioned Jazz festival it celebrated its official press opening only a couple of weeks ago which is how I got there.

As it happened Ian Gillan and Roger Glover were present there at the same time on business. Gillan was completing work on his new album with Glover acting as producer.

Almost three years after the Casino incident the ex Purple vocalist and equally ex Purple bassist find themselves at the same location that acted as a catalyst for the album that broke Deep Purple worldwide. Could this be more than fate?

On with the story . . .

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Since his departure from Purple, Gillan has remained fairly anonymous, apart from the occasional press release advertising his various new business ventures which included a motorcycle factory and a minicab firm.

There were sporadic reports of projected solo albums but nothing ever actually transpired and it seemed that we had lost our silver throated screamer to the world of high finance until one day, about a month ago, it was declared that Gillan was making his return with a new band and album.

Now it was obvious the guy really meant business!

Fortunately Gillan and Glover were residing at the same hotel as myself. Both parties had spent a heavy session in the studios the night previous to my arrival so I didn't expect any contract with them until later that evening. Surprisingly enough Glover managed to submerge from his well-earned rest quite early on in the afternoon.

Since he left the ranks of Purple, Glover has involved himself in quite a lot of production work, so lack of sleep and late nights have become a part of his daily repertoire. Eyes glazed and looking generally fragile he ordered a pot of tea and we sat ourselves in an unassuming corner of the hotel lounge for a chat.

ROGER Glover is a nice guy. He's one of those people you could spend all night talking with about anything and everything. He's a great observer of the music business and he'll always have an interesting answer for any question you care to confront him with.

When I asked him what he had been up to over the last few months he revealed that the Gillan project has taken much longer than expected as there had already been one album recorded about a year ago.

"It was a good album", said Glover, "but it was too much of a solo album and in the end Ian decided that he wanted to get a band together and he wanted to record something that would be much more representative of a band effort."

Gillan and Glover have been close friends for quite a while now, even before their days with Purple they were playing together in a band called Episode Six. In fact it was the band's drummer, Mick Underwood, who inadvertantly got Glover the job in Purple.

Glover explains: "Mick used to play in a band with Ritchie (Blackmore) and Ritchie phoned him up and said 'we're looking for a singer' and he said 'why don't you listen to Ian Gillan'. So they set up an audition and I used to write with Ian at the time so I just sort of tagged along with him 'cause they were also looking for a bass player.

"They must have decided that it would have been a good idea to get two guys who had written together because they were looking for writers."

I asked Glover how it felt to be producing an old colleague.

"It's quite enjoyable really. I learned a lot of production from Purple. I used to do a lot of mixing with little Ian (Paice). The way Purple used to record was to do a backing track first then the vocals. Ian (Gillan) would get most of the lyrics together, but having done that he would be lost for an idea, so it would be the pair of us who would decide what's to go on top.

"I virtually learned production by producing Ian. So doing it now in a way is almost like stepping back in the past."

Has Gillan's sudden revival given Glover any inclination to get back on the road?

"No, I've been through various stages of wanting to be back on the road. For two reasons, one because I miss the life to a certain extent for all the bad things you get on the road it is quite exciting. And the other reason is that I want to write in a group format 'cause writing on my own doesn't come out the same way. If I've got nothing to write for then I write rubbish. If I've got direction then I'll drag something out of the depths.

"Looking at the economics of getting on the road and looking at the things I'll have to give up I don't think I want to go back on the road. Before Deep Purple I had been on the road since 1965 professionally, that's a fair while.

"It was hard to settle down at first but now that I have settled down I find that I'm more creative all in directions. If I went on the road then I'd have to give all that up."

Even without the roadlife Glover is one of those people who has an endless source of energy and channels it in as many directions as possible. Although production probably supplies a major part of his income (he also co-owns a studios in London with Gillan), he certainly has no plans to make a future out of it and still feels that his talents are more musically inclined.

HE has already displayed his versatility with his musical interpretation of William Plomers book of poetry entitled 'Butterfly Ball' which has already seen one extravagent charity performance at the Albert Hall. There are plans for it to become a cartoon series for which Glover will provide incidental music.

"What 'Butterfly Ball' did for me was to make me strong enough not to reject my past, but not to emulate it. When I first did 'Butterfly Ball' I thought what's everyone going to expect of me? I'm not a household name I know. Everyone's not going to be waiting for my album with baited breath to see finally what the master's done. At the same time there is an awareness of me, somewhere along the line, and I don't want to let people down.

"It took quite a few months for me to get the courage to say 'I don't care what the people are going to think I'm going to do it the way I see it right? Now whatever I do in the future I'm not going to care whether it's rock or classical, I don't care what it is as long as it means something that's all that matters."

At this point a medium sized figure wearing a grey army type coat, looking slightly unshaven strolls up to the table to greet us. Why, it's Ian Gillan looking mucho less business like than indicated in recent photographs which showed him to be sporting a matching suit and paunch.

■ *Continued next page*